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# Thinking Ahead: David Cameron, the Henry Jackson Society and British Neo-conservatism

## Abstract

The Conservative Party under David Cameron's leadership has embarked on a series of foreign policy initiatives, which appear to revise the political right's traditional reluctance to interfere in third party conflicts with no obvious British interest. This paper looks at whether this shift is substantial through an examination of Cameron and William Hague's foreign policy pronouncements. Its particular focus is to discuss whether the Henry Jackson Society, a group of academics, parliamentarians and journalists, is exercising any influence over Conservative Party foreign policy discussion. Finally, we consider how critics including individuals associated with the Henry Jackson Society have evaluated Cameron and Hague's tentative interventionist convictions. It is suggested that the notion that idealism in foreign policy has to be conditioned by realism is actually a re-working of Blair's foreign policy especially when applied to overseas intervention.

With the confirmation of Gordon Brown as the new British Prime Minister in June 2007, we now face the prospect of an election sometime sooner than May 2010. Within days of taking office, Brown has had to confront an attempted car bombing of Glasgow Airport by suspected Islamic militants alongside further British military losses in Afghanistan and Iraq. While journalists have noted that Brown's approach to security questions (especially in the immediate aftermath of the Glasgow incident) and the 'War on Terror' is different in tone and substance compared to his predecessor, the new Prime Minister has also been swift to reinforce the importance of the Anglo-American 'special relationship'.<sup>1</sup> In the

aftermath of his first Camp David meeting with George Bush in July 2007, he travelled to the United Nations in order to secure an Anglo-French resolution authorising the dispatch of a substantial UN peace keeping force to Darfur. As he noted:

For today is an important decision day for Darfur - and for change.

The situation in Darfur is the greatest humanitarian disaster the world faces today. Over 200,000 dead, 2 million displaced and 4 million on food aid. Following my meeting with President Bush, and I thank him for his leadership on Darfur, the UK and the French have now, with US support, agreed and tabled a UN Security Council resolution that will mandate the deployment of the worlds largest peacekeeping operation to protect the citizens of Darfur. And I hope this plan - for a 19,000 African Union-UN force - will be adopted later today. Immediately we will work hard to deploy this force quickly. And the plan for Darfur from now on is to achieve a ceasefire, including an end to aerial bombings of civilians; drive forward peace talks starting in Arusha Tanzania this weekend on 3rd August; and as peace is established, offer to and begin to invest in recovery and reconstruction. But we must be clear if any party blocks progress and the killings continue, I and others will redouble our efforts to impose further sanctions.<sup>2</sup>

His UN speech went on to explore in some detail the need for further effort to be expended not merely on the situation in Sudan but also to consider yet again progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. On both sides of the Atlantic, Brown's speech drew complimentary analysis.<sup>3</sup>

For the Conservative leadership under David Cameron, Brown's forays into foreign policy provide precious little comfort. There is renewed pressure on the Leader of the Opposition to mobilise substantive domestic and foreign policies in

the light of evidence that Brown's standing in the opinion polls remains high and even above the symbolically significant 40% level. Worryingly for those hoping that the Conservatives can prevent a fourth electoral victory for the Labour Party, they are not as strong as the current government in areas where they have traditionally commanded a strong lead such as defence and foreign affairs. It now seems a long time ago that Labour were ridiculed and satirised for their defence and security policies in the 1980s especially in the field of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the Labour government under Blair and now Brown have not lost ground to the Conservatives in this policy area, despite the unpopularity of the 2003 Iraqi invasion.

While domestic policy changes and uncertainty have led to caricatures of Cameron's political opportunism, his views on foreign policy have been much more collaborative with Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague. The question posed in this paper is how the Conservative Party are developing distinct new areas of foreign policy debate. We consider some of the arguments and suggestions put forward by senior party figures such as Cameron and Hague. This has shown that the Conservative Party is at least beginning to discuss these ideas, contrary to a *Guardian* leader about a year after Cameron's election which asked "Does the Conservative party have a foreign policy? If it does, what is it? No one seems certain".<sup>4</sup>

One specific area where there has been some shift in Conservative Party thinking has been in the specific area of humanitarian or military intervention in third party conflicts. The Shadow Foreign Secretary, William Hague, has been at the vanguard of this policy reformulation. Traditionally, the political right has been hesitant to intervene in such conflicts without an explicit British benefit. The Major administration (1992-1997) provided one example of Conservative government's hesitation in the midst of the Bosnian conflict. It was only when the Clinton administration committed itself to find a political solution that

European powers including the British, joined efforts to secure a settlement in 1995. Yet since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 the Conservative party has not presented a radically different interpretation of world events to Labour, with the then Conservative leader Michael Howard supporting the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While more recently the Conservatives have broken the largely bipartisan approach of the two main British parties concerning Iraq, this has been around detail, hindsight and political positioning rather than any fundamental ideological division.

Indeed, in the only foreign policy comment in his conference speech pitching for the leadership, Cameron made the following remark

And when we talk about foreign affairs, we don't just stand up for Gibraltar and Zimbabwe but for the people of Darfur and sub-Saharan Africa who are living on less than a dollar a day and getting poorer while we're getting richer.<sup>5</sup>

Hague, in contrast to previous Conservative policy, but close to Blair, has similarly been forthright in championing the question of rights, notably suggesting that William Wilberforce and the abolition of slavery was a first instance of humanitarian intervention.<sup>6</sup> It is this question that is the focus of this piece. In his Conservative Party conference speech of October 2006, Hague presented this new approach to third party conflicts:

A few months ago, in the refugee camps of Darfur, I met people whose homes had been torched, relatives killed and families driven from their land. Looking into their frightened, vulnerable eyes reminded me more of any statistic or chart ever could, that policies is about much more than what we do here at home... In our approach to foreign policy we will never forgot [sic] that there are people in Burma and Darfur who have to

fight for their lives, and indeed under other despotic and vile regimes such as that of Zimbabwe... Foreign affairs may be our greatest of all challenges for the next government of this country. And our mission in preparing for government is simply stated: to understand the world we will be dealing with, and to do so with humility and patience...Our foreign policy, as David Cameron set out on September 11<sup>th</sup> [2006] will be that of liberal conservatives, supportive of spreading freedom and humanitarian intervention, but recognising the complexities of human nature and sceptical of grand schemes to remake the world.<sup>7</sup>

This search for a 'new direction' is still evolving and in a speech to Chatham House in January 2007, Hague reiterated his belief that:

All governments find that idealism in foreign policy has to be tempered with realism but it is important to remember that a world based on any other set of values will be without the means for the tolerance and acceptance of diversity which is of such critical importance in a globalized age.<sup>8</sup>

The notion that idealism in foreign policy has to be conditioned by realism is perhaps a replaying of the Blair's foreign policy position, which attempted to negotiate the tensions of political realism with moral idealism. This problem, especially when combined with his highly personalised 'special relationship' with the George W. Bush , were was cruelly exposed in the 'Yo Blair' moment, when it was only too apparent that Prime Ministerial influence on American foreign policy was limited at best.<sup>9</sup> In combination with Blair's reluctance to criticise the Israeli bombing of Lebanon in the summer of 2006, this allowed Hague in particular to shift Conservative Party thinking towards a nascent form of liberal neo-conservatism, which continues to debated within various policy commissions established in the aftermath of Cameron's leadership success. This intellectual

transformation, however incomplete, continues against a backdrop of a Brown administration.

In the following sections of this paper, we explore further recent Conservative Party thinking on foreign policy. Our focus is particularly on interventionism, rather than Europe or relations with China or Russia. In the next section, we consider the Henry Jackson Society, which has attracted a variety of signatories including senior members of the Conservative Party. Given the Society's determination to shape foreign policy debates in Britain, we pose the question as to whether this group of individuals and their associated manifestos have influenced ongoing Conservative Party debates about foreign policy and Britain's role in the world. Thereafter we consider why British neo-conservatives have expressed their support for Cameron's policy machinations and assess evolving discussions about the new foreign policy.

### **Cameron and the Henry Jackson Society**

In an unguarded moment in an interview Cameron suggested that the non-Conservative Prime Minister he most admired might well have been Palmerston.<sup>10</sup> Given Palmerston's robust foreign policy, often characterized as 'gun-boat diplomacy', this is revealing. More concrete indications come from a look at Cameron's principal advisors. During his election campaign, three figures stood out: Michael Gove (Conservative MP and former leader writer for *The Times*), Ed Vaizey (Conservative MP and member of Cameron's campaign team) and George Osborne. Osborne is the shadow Chancellor, who hailed the "excellent neoconservative case" for action against Iraq<sup>11</sup> and stressed that he is a "signed-up, card-carrying Bush fan".<sup>12</sup> We find something similar in former Conservative leader Michael Howard's views of the Iraq war, an even starker and stronger case than Blair. He would have gone to war even if he had known there were no 'weapons of mass destruction', and even if the case for war was "not

clear-cut". Had it been clearly illegal he would not have launched war, but he noted in May 2005 that "as the attorney general himself recognised in the opinion that we were at last allowed to see last week, it is possible to hold different views on the legality of questions like that. International law is not precise. There is room for more than one opinion. If I had honestly held the opinion that it was legal to go to war, I would have taken the same action but I would have told the truth about it and I would have had a plan".<sup>13</sup> Osborne's detailed foreign policy views, with the exception of obvious indications concerning Europe, are as yet relatively unknown. But Vaizey and Gove are explicit in their allegiances, both being signatories of the Henry Jackson Society's "Statement of Principles". What does this society aim for?

*The Henry Jackson Society* is a non-profit and non-partisan organisation that seeks to promote the following principles: that liberal democracy should be spread across the world; that as the world's most powerful democracies, the United States and the European Union – under British leadership – must shape the world more actively by intervention and example; that such leadership requires political will, a commitment to universal human rights and the maintenance of a strong military with global expeditionary reach; and that too few of our leaders in Britain and the rest of Europe today are ready to play a role in the world that matches our strength and responsibilities.<sup>14</sup>

This, they suggest, can be understood under the heading of "a principled policy of democratic realism". This is a telling phrase, one taken from American neoconservative Charles Krauthammer, yet it is one he sees as an explicitly "American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World",<sup>15</sup> whereas for the Henry Jackson Society this is 'the British Moment'.<sup>16</sup> Krauthammer suggests that the means of internationalism and legalism should be "in service to a larger vision: remaking the international system in the image of domestic society".<sup>17</sup> This is intended to



“transcend power politics, narrow national interest, and, ultimately, the nation-state itself... they welcome the decline of sovereignty as the road to the new globalism of a norm-driven, legally bound international system broken to the mode of domestic society”.<sup>18</sup>

Before we move to their ‘Statement of Principles’ it is worth dwelling for a moment on who Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson was. Again, though they assert a British identity, their namesake was a prominent US politician. Jackson was a Democratic senator and failed presidential candidate in 1976 who advocated a foreign policy of strength and ‘moral clarity’, resisted *détente* with the Soviets (and was very critical of their restrictions on Jewish emigration) alongside supporting the war in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> He sought a progressive New Deal politics at home and a strongly anti-communist policy abroad, sometimes known as Cold War liberalism. In 1974, for instance, he argued that future US-Soviet relations should be tied to the human rights record of the Soviets and that American administrations should not be reluctant to use military and economic levers to change the internal behaviour of other states including superpowers. Famously, Jackson clashed with Henry Kissinger over *détente* and the Ford administration actually stopped using the term in 1975.<sup>20</sup>

Though a Democrat he was widely respected by Republicans and thus serves as an emblematic figure of a bi-partisan foreign policy. As some commentators have noted, the roots of neoconservatism are mostly on the ‘left’ of US politics, disillusioned with a perceived unwillingness to defend liberal values and confront totalitarianism.<sup>21</sup> As Murray notes, Paul Wolfowitz himself prefers the label of “Scoop Jackson Republican” to neoconservative.<sup>22</sup> Jackson’s name is given to several organizations in the US, such as The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine;<sup>23</sup> the Henry M. Jackson Foundation which provides research grants;<sup>24</sup> and the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington.<sup>25</sup> For the British Henry Jackson Society

he was an opponent of “unprincipled accommodation, which abandoned the wider cause of human rights and compromised security”.<sup>26</sup>

The Society’s ‘Statement of Principles’, dated 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005, just under two years since the invasion of Iraq, advocates a “robust foreign policy... based on clear universal principles”.<sup>27</sup> These include “the global promotion of the rule of law, liberal democracy, civil rights, environmental responsibility and the market economy”. They claim that a belief in “strength and human rights”, owing much to Jackson, “hastened the collapse of the Soviet dictatorship”. Yet like many other commentators they suggest that the benefits of the victory in the Cold War were squandered through complacency. The Clinton administration (1993-2001), according to this view, deserves considerable opprobrium for failing through its military and economic power to change the behaviour of others; Bosnia was a key failure, as was policy in Yugoslavia more generally; while Kosovo and Sierra Leone “although imperfect, provide an appropriate model for future action”. This future action need not always be through military action, as the actions and successes of EU and NATO expansion demonstrate. Thus the Society calls “for an assertive and active role for Britain on the world stage”,<sup>28</sup> suggesting that contrary to suggestions that Britain has attempted to punch above its weight, traditionally, under realist conservatism, “Britain actually punches *below* its weight”.<sup>29</sup> Tying humanitarian intervention to the project of the Bush administration, they suggest that Blair’s premiership, for them, was a “sea change in foreign policy”.<sup>30</sup> Kamm suggests that ‘neoconservative’ can be “an accurate description of a progressive political stance, and of Blair’s foreign policies in particular”;<sup>31</sup> and Murray suggests that Blair was “almost perfectly neoconservative on foreign policy”.<sup>32</sup> As noted above, the ideals of liberal humanitarian intervention espoused by the likes of Blair and Kofi Annan and the claims about ‘contingent sovereignty’ made by prominent neoconservatives share a very similar logic.<sup>33</sup>

The Society therefore proposes a number of key principles:-

1. [it] believes that modern liberal democracies set an example to which the rest of the world should aspire.
2. Supports a 'forward strategy' to assist those countries that are not yet liberal and democratic to become so. This would involve the full spectrum of our 'carrot' capacities, be they diplomatic, economic, cultural or political, but also, when necessary, those 'sticks' of the military domain.
3. Supports the maintenance of a strong military, by the United States, the countries of the European Union and other democratic powers, armed with expeditionary capabilities with a global reach.
4. Supports the necessary furtherance of European military modernisation and integration under British leadership, preferably within NATO.
5. Stresses the importance of unity between the world's great democracies, represented by institutions such as NATO, the European Union and the OECD, amongst many others.
6. Believes that only modern liberal democratic states are truly legitimate, and that any international organisation which admits undemocratic states on an equal basis is fundamentally flawed.
7. Gives two cheers for capitalism. There are limits to the market, which needs to serve the Democratic Community and should be reconciled to the environment.
8. Accepts that we have to set priorities and that sometimes we have to compromise, but insists that we should never lose sight of our fundamental values. This means that alliances with repressive regimes can only be temporary. It also means a strong commitment to individual and civil liberties in democratic states, even and especially when we are under attack.<sup>34</sup>

It continues to claim that it does “not represent any specific political party or persuasion, but provide a forum for those who agree with these simple guiding principles, or who wish to learn more about them”. It is clear from these principles that it asserts the superiority of modern liberal democracy; and that both economic and military pressures can and should be used to promote this as the norm of governments across the world. The ‘carrot’ being offered may simply be a less obvious ‘stick’; or to put it another way economic pressure can be used so that carrots become sticks. It offers a critique of the UN and other multinational organisations that admit states that do not fit this model of “modern liberal democratic” states, and asserts that if the EU is to operate militarily this should be within NATO. Although this is explicitly tied to British leadership, operating within NATO would allow a US veto; something a purely EU force would not. It attempts to offer something to the left or the green movement in point 7, but merely as ways of mediating the market rather than as alternatives. Finally it advocates an idealism tempered by realism,<sup>35</sup> and a nod to libertarians worried about the restrictions imposed in the ‘war on terror’.

Signatories of the Statement of Principles include a range of elected figures, journalists, academics and practitioners. Conservative MPs include Michael Ancram, formerly Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence and Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party; David Willetts, Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Skills, along with Gove and Vaizey. Gisela Stuart, MP for Birmingham Edgbaston and UK representative on the EU Constitution, Greg Pope and Denis MacShane, formerly Minister of State for Europe, are Labour MPs who have signed up.<sup>36</sup> Oliver Kamm and Stephen Pollard of *The Times*; historian and broadcaster Andrew Roberts; Sir Richard Dearlove, the former head of MI6; Jamie Shea of NATO; David Trimble and Lord Powell of Bayswater are some of the other profile names. It has used its media links to publicise its aims, particularly in a piece masquerading as journalism by one of those signatories.<sup>37</sup> Also involved are

some of those actively involved in the war against and occupation of Iraq, notably Colonel Tim Collins and provincial governor Mark Etherington. The International Patrons are a similarly impressive array of figures, many from the US. They include James Wolsey, former director of the CIA, William Kristol of *The Weekly Standard*, Robert Kagan and Richard Perle – all key figures within US neoconservatism. Perle was a former aide to Jackson, and Kagan is the author of the influential *Paradise and Power* which contrasts American and European attitudes to the current world order.<sup>38</sup> Irwin Stelzer, also a prominent neoconservative and Rupert Murdoch's man in Britain, is a signatory too. Revealingly he described Cameron as "an empty vessel waiting to be filled".<sup>39</sup> It is clear that the Henry Jackson Society is intending for its ideas on foreign policy to be part of the contents.<sup>40</sup>

For those that think this far-fetched, the Project for a New American Century, founded in 1997 during the Clinton 'interregnum' both provided many of the key figures of the Bush administration as well as much of its policy. Indeed it is striking how much of its 1997 'Statement of Principles' and its 2000 manifesto *Rebuilding America's Defenses* reappeared in the 2002 National Security Strategy.<sup>41</sup> However, as Francis Fukuyama, has recently lamented, the intellectual influence of neo-conservatives did not produce a set of foreign policies under the Bush administration that he would now approve of.<sup>42</sup> As he noted, the Bush administration failed to predict the backlash provoked by American hegemonic ambitions, under-estimated opposition in Iraq, over-estimated its capabilities to social engineer a new Iraq and wider Middle East and has failed to appreciate the developmental challenges facing weak states in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> Indeed this disillusionment of the neo-cons has been pronounced recently, with the likes of David Frum and Richard Perle – speech writer to Bush and Pentagon advisor respectively, and authors of the manifesto *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* – breaking ranks shortly before the mid-term elections in late 2006.<sup>44</sup>

## **Against Realism and Moral Relativism**

One of the affiliated academics to the Henry Jackson Society is Brendan Simms, Reader in the History of International Relations at Cambridge and author of a prominent critique of British policy on Bosnia.<sup>45</sup> Simms, who is Co-President of the Society, suggests that one of its aims is to “show that actually many of the ideas considered to be neoconservative are actually ideas that come very much from within the mainstream tradition of U.S. foreign policy”.<sup>46</sup> In this, as in his book on Bosnia, he is advocating a critique of traditional British conservative foreign policy and its predominantly realist outlook.<sup>47</sup> Yet like the American model they hope to appeal across the political spectrum and bring in those in the Labour party who, like Blair, are supporters of the turn toward intervention – humanitarian or for national or global security – in US foreign policy.<sup>48</sup> As David Clark, a former Labour adviser to Robin Cook notes, the British left “can be reluctant to assert the superiority of liberal democracy, thereby laying itself open to the charge of moral relativism”.<sup>49</sup> This is precisely one of the charges that the Henry Jackson Society is quick to lay at their door; just as it is similarly critical of those unwilling to actively intervene to enforce that perceived superiority.

This critique is particularly apparent in a book written by Michael Gove himself, under the title of *Celsius 7/7*.<sup>50</sup> The irony of a book by a neoconservative that both mirrors Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and converts the ‘imperial’ message to a European metric is seemingly lost on him. The contrasts in other areas, however, are extremely stark. Like the Society more generally, Gove lists the failures of 1990s foreign policy on both sides of the Atlantic: in “Bosnia, Iraq, Somalia, Northern Ireland – the West has been shown to be either weak, temporizing or irresolute in the face of threats”.<sup>51</sup> Similarly he has no time for attempts to understand the enemy in the ‘war on terror’: “the primary moral

responsibility for acts of evil – and any attempt to qualify the word is itself a moral surrender – rests with the authors of that evil”.<sup>52</sup>

Like many of the US neoconservatives he constructs a strong defence of Israel, but this goes beyond merely the support for their actions in ‘response’ to threats. Gove believes Israel was legitimate in terms of its seizing of Arab territory, and wants to underline that this territory was not Palestinian when Israel occupied it. He continues: “what was striking about the people who lived on that territory, who were thought of as Palestinian, is the way they were treated between 1948 and 1967 by all of Israel’s neighbours”.<sup>53</sup> This for Gove is another example where the West needs to recognise the Israel, as the only liberal Western democracy in the region, needs support, not criticism. For him “the space for moral clarity has been squeezed out by the dominance of moral relativism”.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, he has no truck with those who either lament and or condemn the state of Israel for ignoring United Nations resolutions regarding occupation of the West Bank, constructing the security fence on illegally occupied land, sanctioning assassination of political opponents, bombing civilians, and treating Arab Israelis as second class citizens. Moreover, as critics would also contend, Israel possesses the most sophisticated conventional armed forces in the region and is an established nuclear weapon state.

In terms of the war on Iraq, Gove has no time for those that sought the UN route and the backing of ‘international law’, claiming that “it is remarkable that a democratic vote in the United Kingdom should not be considered truly legitimate unless it has been approved by a body that is, in itself, profoundly anti-democratic and that vests veto power in nations that are serial abusers of human rights”.<sup>55</sup> In this he mirrors the Henry Jackson Society’s critique of the UN.<sup>56</sup> In terms of the conduct of this war and the one in Afghanistan, he bemoans the way Guantánamo Bay, daisy-cutter bombs or depleted uranium shells are criticized, without the “tactics of our enemies” being explored.<sup>57</sup> What Gove

neglects, of course, is that criticizing actions in the 'war on terror' does not necessarily excuse or exonerate any other actions. Indeed it is precisely the West's claims to moral high ground that put them in a position where their actions are more open to scrutiny. And in the case of Israel, it is precisely because it is a democratic state that it is subject to critical scrutiny by academics and campaigners even if pro-Israeli lobby groups in the United States often accuse critics of being anti-Semitic.<sup>58</sup> Innocents are slaughtered on all sides, and to recognise this in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon is not to diminish the suffering of those who died in the twin towers, the trains of Madrid or London, or in the buses that operate in Israel.

Gove reserves some of his strongest criticism for those who believe that the West is imposing freedom or democracy:

Furthermore, I could discuss the argument that we have no right, in the majesty of our Western arrogance, to 'impose' democracy. As if allowing people to choose their ruler, and indeed their form of government, can be understood, other than by twisting the English language out of all recognition, as an 'imposition'. I could ask on what basis life under an arbitrary, capricious and torture-addicted tyrant is morally superior to life under a ruler one can choose, and choose to remove, oneself.<sup>59</sup>

Yet to object to the invasion of Iraq is not to support the violent regime of Saddam. Again Gove neglects the way in which democratically elected regimes that do not fit the West's view of acceptable are continually targeted and seen as illegitimate. Democracy has to mean accepting those who oppose, not merely those who will be malleable. Arafat was elected, Hamas was elected, Hezbollah has electoral support too as does the current President of Iran. For Gove though, this would be to surrender too much to a plurality. Values are important, but only



those that are shared and these must be asserted forcefully. This is something that he advocates as a response to the London bombs of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005.

More broadly, we also need to rediscover and reproclaim faith in our common values. We need an ideological effort to move away from moral relativism and towards moral clarity, as well as a commitment to build a truly inclusive model of British citizenship in which divisive separatist identities are challenged, and rejected.<sup>60</sup>

Thus integration, and integrative, rather than separate, and therefore *separatist*, identities are needed. Trading on the ideas of the Orientalist Bernard Lewis, as do many of the neoconservatives in America, Gove is clear about this.<sup>61</sup>

### **The British Moment?**

Why then did Gove and others that can be characterised British neoconservatives opt for Cameron? For Neil Clark it is more than Stelzer's idea of him as an 'empty vessel':

What has happened is that British neoconservatives, faced with the nightmarish possibility that in a straight fight between David Davis and Kenneth Clarke the more charismatic and anti-war former chancellor would prevail, sought to undermine support for the latter by reinventing Cameron, the pro-war Thatcherite, as the voice of Tory 'moderation'.<sup>62</sup>

This "cloak-and-dagger" approach is mocked in the pages of the Henry Jackson Society manifesto,<sup>63</sup> yet it seems undeniable that in Cameron they have an ally. Many of his more explicit pronouncements on foreign policy make sense within this context. This is especially the case in a 2005 speech given before he became leader. It discusses the weakness of the West in the face of threats in the 1990s

that can be seen as preludes to the terrorism of 2001: Somalia, the embassy bombings in Africa, and the USS Cole.<sup>64</sup> Cameron claimed that the war on Iraq was justified, and signifies his opposition to a "premature withdrawal – and a failure to support the Iraqi authority". Like others he claims that it was "French obstruction" that denied the second resolution on Iraq and tellingly titles one of the sections of his speech "Homeland Security".<sup>65</sup>

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, explicitly timed to mark five years of the 'war on terror', Cameron outlined a number of differences between what he called 'liberal conservatism' and 'neo-conservatism'.<sup>66</sup> Neo-conservatism could be characterised as "a realistic appreciation of the scale of the threat the world faces from terrorism"; "a conviction that pre-emptive military action is not only an appropriate, but a necessary component of tackling the terrorist threat in the short term"; and "a belief that in the medium and long term, the promotion of freedom and democracy, including through regime change, is the best guarantee of our security". He suggested that the judgment of neo-conservatism had to be mixed, but that the clear aim from this point forward had to be "developing with America a tough and effective foreign policy for the age of international terrorism – a policy that moves beyond neo-conservatism, retaining its strengths but learning from its failures". Cameron explicitly signs up to the first of the neo-conservative principles; and adds that "I believe that the neo-conservatives are right to argue that extending freedom is an essential objective of Western foreign policy". He also supports the idea that "Western powers should be prepared, in the last resort, to use military force", but suggests that what has been lacking in the last five years is "humility and patience".

On the basis of these two words he wants to inject a conservative scepticism toward "grand schemes to remake the world". He thus sets his "liberal conservatism" in opposition to "neo-conservatism". The 'conservatism' comes not only from a scepticism but also recognition of "the complexities of human

nature”; yet the ‘liberal’ comes because he supports “the aim of spreading freedom and democracy, and support[s] humanitarian intervention”. This leads him to five propositions:

First, that we should understand fully the threat we face.

Second, that democracy cannot quickly be imposed from outside.

Third, that our strategy needs to go far beyond military action.

Fourth, that we need a new multilateralism to tackle the new global challenges we face.

And fifth, that we must strive to act with moral authority.

While it would be glib to suggest this is merely finessing differences *within* neo-conservatism, this is certainly a debate within a dominant conception of foreign policy. Yet some of these are assertions where nobody would really assert the opposite – especially relevant for points 1, 3, and 5 – which is, at best, banal. While there are differences from prominent US neo-conservatives on some key aspects, perhaps particularly on the urge for multilateralism, there seems to be little here to which Blair would not agree. Indeed, on the last point Cameron is at most disagreeing with Blair on the application of a principle concerning “the common values of humanity” rather than the principle itself. Cameron adds: “but if we assume – and I think we should assume – some responsibility for extending these values internationally, we must strive to do so in a way that is consistent and honourable. A moral mission requires moral methods”. Legitimacy is thus key to this ‘liberal conservatism’.<sup>67</sup>

The Henry Jackson Society has criticised some of the points of Cameron’s speech, suggesting it was “partisan party politics”, “light on stressing the importance of ‘values’” and “muddled”. Most critically it accuses him of not having realised that the world changed on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

Is Mr. Cameron a post 11th September person or a pre 11th September person? In other words, has he realised that our supporting of dictators overseas causes extremism, or is he content to carry on by supporting tyrannies, so long as they are our 'friends'?<sup>68</sup>

How far, then, should idealism be tempered by realism? Some of Cameron's other foreign policy ideas have also raised problems. One of these was his commitment to leave the centre-right "European people's party" coalition within the European parliament, which was kicked into the long grass because of the problematic nature of the alternative alliances.<sup>69</sup> Yet we would suggest that these policies are not fully formed, and demonstrate that the field is open to change. From a different perspective, this is exactly how the Henry Jackson Society sees it.

There are many positive points in Mr. Cameron's 'liberal conservatism' to recommend it for those who support a values-based, robust, interventionist, global posture for Britain with a foreign policy that marries principles, power and interests. However, there is also a great deal of incoherence, generated by the evident tension between Mr. Cameron talking to competing galleries.<sup>70</sup>

## **The Foreign Policy of the Future**

The Henry Jackson Society notes that "there is no clear trajectory for the future of British foreign policy".<sup>71</sup> The Society proudly triumphs the way that it has been "described as either 'Blairite' or 'Neoconservative'" as proof of its "non-partisan nature".<sup>72</sup> Yet these positions are not nearly as far apart as such a positioning might imply, and Cameron is explicit that his "new approach to foreign affairs – liberal conservatism" is one which seeks to retain "the strengths of the neo-conservative approach while learning from its failures".<sup>73</sup> Some of its affiliates

have seen Ariel Sharon's breaking of Israeli politics through the Kadima party as a similar move of uniting elements of the traditional left and right.<sup>74</sup> Other commentators have seen Bush's remaking of foreign policy as doing something similar.<sup>75</sup> Thus the Henry Jackson Society sees themselves "as a bi-partisan group of progressives and democrats" eager to shape the future contours of British foreign policy.<sup>76</sup>

Despite its differences, particularly situating itself more on the left, *The Euston Manifesto* is similarly a project that proclaims itself as an alliance of "democrats and progressives". This too seeks to broaden its alliance "beyond the socialist Left towards egalitarian liberals and others of unambiguous democratic commitment".<sup>77</sup> Though some of its signatories opposed the Iraq war, it generally advocates a strong interventionist foreign policy. This opposition within the movement already speaks to the key concern. A policy of intervention necessarily needs lines to be drawn and choices to be made. Yet both *The Euston Manifesto*, The Henry Jackson Society, neoconservatism and liberal humanitarians seems unable to agree on the criteria by which such decisions can be arrived at. Divisions in the international community led to the UN being bypassed in Kosovo and inaction in Rwanda. Iraq split the Security Council in the understanding of resolution 1441, and the possibility of a second resolution unambiguously endorsing action. Others have raised the question of why Iraq was targeted when other abuses of human rights are tacitly allowed, in, for example, Zimbabwe, Myanmar and China. Only recently have the tensions of great power politics been sufficiently resolved to enable an united front on the situation in Sudan.

Blair's foreign policy might be characterised as an idealism moderated by realism. Interventions that should take place may be limited by the realm of what is possible. The Henry Jackson Society has a similar definition of scope, as would, we suggest, Cameron and Hague. For the signatories of the Euston Manifesto,

however, “there is a duty upon the international community of intervention and rescue. Once a threshold of inhumanity has been crossed, there is a ‘responsibility to protect’”.<sup>78</sup> The Manifesto does not, however, specify what that ‘threshold of inhumanity’ might look like beyond condemning murder, torture and slaughter – as one would expect – and whether it might in practice vary from place to place. For others there is a straight-forward realism: act where it is clearly in the national self-interest. Blair has been clear in rejecting this equation, suggesting that his policies are ones of “enlightened self-interest”, where in a globalised world “self-interest and our mutual interests are today inextricably woven together”.<sup>79</sup> What is revealing is how this idealism moderated by realism seems to be almost the exact reverse of what Cook was initially advocating in Labour’s foreign policy. There the call for an “ethical perspective” was to use values as a check or balance to foreign policy, rather than putatively universal values being the end in themselves. For Gove this is the move from moral relativism towards moral clarity. Yet inevitably values are a contested region, and the universal model of values espoused by Bush, Blair and the British neoconservatives is, despite their claims, not shared by all.

Although he disagrees on the desirable outcome from The Henry Jackson Society, David Clark has similarly called for a rethinking and realigning that can follow the end of the Blair era, to “take a new direction in the fight against terrorism around which liberals and progressives can unite”. He suggests that to squander this opportunity “would be to play into the hands of those who want the next era of British politics to be a conservative one”.<sup>80</sup> Looking at what that might be, especially through the eyes of the Henry Jackson Society is revealing. Cameron has, like Blair before him, stressed the assertion of values as guides to foreign policy in the ‘war on terror’.<sup>81</sup> And notably Hague has called for a respect for human rights to be at the core of British foreign policy. In a speech strikingly reminiscent of Blair, he declares

Not only is it right to champion freedom, justice and human rights, it is also in our national interests to do so. It has become increasingly clear in recent years that dictators do not make good partners – politically, commercially or strategically. They sow instability, reek of corruption, and threaten their own people.<sup>82</sup>

There have of course been differences, notably over Lebanon, where Hague's attitude was not only more in keeping with wider public opinion but was perhaps also a tactic intended to exploit Labour divisions.<sup>83</sup> As noted above, comments concerning Iraq have shown a similar logic. Kenneth Adelman described the neo-conservative guiding principle as "the idea of a tough foreign policy on behalf of morality, the idea of using our power for moral good in the world".<sup>84</sup> Though Adelman suggests that this is dead for a generation because of the Iraq debacle, it is not difficult to see how Cameron, like Blair and Brown, would sign up to this principle.

For Matthew Jamison of the Henry Jackson Society, Cameron has planted "his standard firmly in interventionist territory". Yet it suggests that he needs to be cautious. The ideals of his 'liberal conservatism' are ultimately irreconcilable, Jamison suggests, with diplomatic realism. Jamison hopes that in the last instance, Cameron's "interventionist convictions will overwhelm the Realist caution that would be inimical to Britain's ethical and strategic interests".<sup>85</sup> Thus on many things in foreign policy the new British conservatism is not so different from Blair. And that is precisely the reason we should be concerned.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

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- 26 The Henry Jackson Society, *The British Moment*, p. 107.
- 27 It is revealing, in this regard, that they see themselves as a "*post-war* rather than *pro-war* organisation", responding to and benefiting from the fracturing of traditional politics (The Henry Jackson Society, *The British Moment*, p. 14).
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54 Gove, *Celsius 7/7*, p. 82; The Henry Jackson Society, *The British Moment*, p. 11.

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84

Interview in Rose, "Neo Culpa".

85

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